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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SARAJEVO 000454

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DEFENSE FOR FATA, BEIN

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TAGS: PREL PGOV BK

SUBJECT: BOSNIA - SILAJDZIC ASSUMES PRESIDENCY CHAIR; SHOWS
NO SIGNS OF MODERATING APPROACH

REF: 07 SARAJEVO 863

Classified By: Acting DCM Paul Boyd. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: Bosniak Member of the Presidency Haris Silajdzic assumed the chairmanship of the institution on March 6. Silajdzic's actions and comments in recent weeks indicate that he plans to use his chairmanship to promote his divisive political agenda. His agenda, rooted in the past, has contributed to the radicalization of Bosniak politics and to growing tensions between Bosniaks and Serbs over the last two years. In particular, we anticipate Silajdzic will continue efforts to hold Serbia "accountable" for obligations he believes stem from the February 2007 International Court of Justice (ICJ) verdict that genocide took place in and around Srebrenica in July 1995. Silajdzic may also revive previous public calls for the abolition of Republika Srpska (RS) as part of his push for constitutional reform.

Silajdzic's staff has told us privately that he will wait for the dust to settle over Kosovo before making a big push on constitutional reform. Silajdzic began his tenure by calling on Montenegro to issue an apology for its participation in the 1992-1995 Bosnian war and by criticizing Russia. Given this start and Silajdzic's professed political aims and his propensity for divisive rhetoric, Silajdzic chairmanship is likely to provide ample fodder for RS PM Dodik to justify his own anti-Dayton behavior, including calls for RS independence if Bosniaks "do not recognize us." END SUMMARY

Silajdzic's Public Exposure Will Rise

¶12. (SBU) On March 6, Bosniak Member of the Tri-Presidency Haris Silajdzic assumed the chairmanship of the institution from President Zeljko Komsic. President Silajdzic will hold the rotating Presidency chairmanship for the next eight months. The chairmanship does not allow Presidency members any additional powers or authorities aside from the privilege of speaking first at public and diplomatic gatherings and chairing the intra-Presidency working group that sets the institution's agenda. The chairmanship does provide the Presidency member who occupies it with a higher public profile, however, and frequent opportunities to use the position as a "bully pulpit." President Komsic deliberately sought to exploit his chairmanship to develop an image as the politician most "close to ordinary people" and as a moderate alternative to the country's more nationalist alternatives. According to a recent International Republican Institute

poll, Komsic is now the most popular politician among Federation voters. (Note: Komsic's support comes overwhelming from Bosniaks, but his standing has improved, albeit from a very low base, among Croats. End Note)

Reviving The ICJ Controversy

13. (C) In the first month of his chairmanship, Silajdzic will lead delegations to two important international gatherings: the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit in Senegal March 13-14 and the NATO Bucharest Summit April 2-4. Silajdzic has already sought to revive the February 2007 ICJ verdict as a political weapon. In mid-February, he sought Presidency approval for a letter to the United Nations Secretary General requesting that the UN Security Council

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ensure Serbia complied with the verdict. (Note: The ICJ judgment requires Serbia to cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and hand over individuals accused by ICTY of acts of genocide, notably Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic. End Note) Serbian member of the Tri-Presidency Nebojsa Radmanovic invoked Vital National Interest (VNI) to block the letter; the RS National Assembly voted to uphold VNI on February 22.

Genocide, the RS, and Compromise

14. (C) Though the ICJ verdict did not have any legal implications for the RS, Silajdzic has sought to exploit it in his ongoing campaign against the RS and to justify his refusal to compromise with Bosnian Serbs on key reforms. This strategy has yet to produce results for him, but we

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expect Silajdzic will continue nonetheless (Note: In March 2007, Silajdzic blocked an OHR proposal that would have transferred control of the police from the entities to the state because it would not have changed the name of the RS; seven months later Silajdzic accepted the Mostar Agreement, which leaves the RS police under its current name under RS control. End Note) Silajdzic and his staff have indicated that he plans to press for constitutional reform, and this campaign may involve a revival of his public calls for the abolishment of the RS. However, his staff have stressed to us that Silajdzic wants "the dust to settle" on Kosovo before any major push for constitutional change.

Reviving Up The Rhetorical Engine

15. (C) Before assuming the chairmanship, Silajdzic delivered a lengthy and strident speech at the official Presidency commemoration of Bosnian Independence Day held on February 29 in which he condemned alleged Bosnian Serb efforts to make Bosnia a country of "unequal rights, segregation and ghettos." Reviving an old theme, Silajdzic warned that U.S. and European policies were contributing to the radicalization of Bosnia's Muslim population, explaining that "ghettos in BiH are dangerous with implications known to everybody." Silajdzic also accused RS Prime Minister Dodik of trying to "revitalize the project of Slobodan Milosevic." Silajdzic's comments did receive some negative press coverage for their tone and level of inappropriateness for the occasion -- a distinction underscored by Komsic's thoughtful speech at the commemoration in which he spoke of a Bosnia "large enough and rich enough for all."

Foreign Policy As A Tool To Further A Domestic Agenda

16. (C) Silajdzic has already demonstrated his willingness to use the Presidency's authority to direct Bosnian foreign policy for his own political ends. On March 6, the day he

assumed the chairmanship, the Bosnian press carried Silajdzic's request that Montenegrin President Vujanovic apologize on behalf of his country for "the irresponsible position of Montenegrin powers in the past," stressing Bosnian citizens "expected" Montenegro to apologize for its actions during the war. Silajdzic has also criticized Russia, which most Bosniaks perceive as encouraging and protecting Dodik. Latching on to an incident in which the Bosnian Embassy in Moscow received a threatening letter, Silajdzic on March 4 publicly condemned the "the recent wider campaign against Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly the Bosniaks, by certain diplomatic circles of the Russian Federation, by the state media, as well as by academic circles."

Comment

¶7. (C) Within the Presidency itself, there already exists a substantial level of animosity between the offices of three Presidency members, due in large part to Silajdzic's partisan and uncompromising approach to issues. For an institution that relies on consensus-based decision-making, this is at times crippling. Siljadzic's chairmanship is unlikely to improve matters. Given his history, we expect Siljadzic will exploit the opportunity provided by his new position to further his anti-RS political agenda, which will only further polarize Bosnian politics. It is important to note that Silajdzic will hold the chairmanship through the October 2008 local elections. This will increase the temptation to use the chairmanship to advance his party's electoral futures by promoting a Bosniak nationalist agenda. In short, the Siljadzic chairmanship is likely to provide plenty of justifications for Dodik to claim Bosniaks refuse to "recognize" the RS and build a case that the RS's only path lies outside Bosnia.

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